

## HIRING AND BREAKING-IN EMPLOYEES

Kenneth Wolf\*

Labor constitutes the highest operational cost item in many agriculture-related Texas businesses. Labor costs often are excessive because of employee turnover. The key to reducing labor turnover is to master the techniques of hiring and breaking-in new workers.

### Pre-hiring Action

A job description including all duties assigned to the position should be clearly outlined in writing before hiring an employee. It is generally risky to employ a person before clearly outlining his duties. Creating a position to fit a new individual may result in the following undesirable situations.

- Duties assigned to the new employee may have to be withdrawn from another employee. Such action often causes human relations problems.
- Duplication of duties may occur among employees.
- Unnecessary work may be created just to fit the new employee's special talents. This often occurs when a new employee hired without a definite job description is told to "carve himself out" a place in the organization.
- In time, the employee's lack of definite direction and his resultant inability to produce tangible achievements will result in frustration.

Establish a wage rate which is competitive for the area. An appropriate rate also falls in proper relation to other company jobs and provides an adequate living for the employee and his family. Agriculture-related businessmen too often hire the cheapest help available.

Benefits accompanying a position should be carefully determined and outlined.

\*Extension economist—agribusiness, Texas A&M University.

### Securing Employees

Explore all sources for possible job applicants, including the Texas Employment Commission, classified ads, employment agencies and word-of-mouth. Friends and acquaintances of the present labor force are usually the best sources. Many successful businesses publicize to all present employees that a vacancy exists and the type of person desired. Current employees feel honored when the employer asks them to recommend a new worker. Research shows that employees generally recommend applicants they know will "carry their own weight" on the job.

Take written applications, but keep them simple—yet complete enough to cover key points. After hiring has been completed, notify all unsuccessful applicants that their interest was appreciated. Request permission to retain their applications for future reference and consideration.

Interview applicants in the proper setting. An interview is usually ineffective when done in haste, on the run or under noisy and distracting conditions. Although the applicant's skills are very important, strive to determine the applicant's attitudes as well. The person who will be directly supervising the new employee should always be permitted to interview the applicant. During the interview, the position to be filled should be carefully explained to the applicant. Also, policies of the company should be explained. When practical, employees who are to operate machinery should be tested on the machines to be operated.

### Applicant Skills

An individual's skills should fit the job to be done. Don't over-hire!

Employee productivity research shows that a person is most productive if his achievements meet his aspirations. If he has reached a level as high as he expected — or even higher — he tends to be pleased with his progress. A happy and productive worker is one who feels his highest talents are used. This is a simple matter of self-fulfillment. The following are signs of over-hiring.

- The tendency to be absent from work for flimsy reasons exists among employees who actually dread going to work. A high rate of absence due to sickness often occurs.

- A high employee turnover rate exists.

- Losses due to accidents and wasted materials are increased.

- An over-skilled worker has a sour attitude in general toward the company. The attitude rubs off on other workers, customers and the general public. A widespread complaint of young scientists and engineers in business is that their jobs could be filled by clerks or others with no formal technical education.

### Roadblocks to Hiring

Beware of the employer who thinks he is gifted with the peculiar ability to "look 'em in the eye" and judge.

*Short notice "quits" to be replaced in a hurry.* Hire someone temporarily after a short-notice quit. Pay a premium wage to the temporary worker, if necessary, and take sufficient time to hire the permanent replacement.

*Poor evaluations of previous jobs.* Job titles are very misleading. Be more concerned with duties performed in previous jobs than with titles held.

*Somebody's friend.* Although friends and acquaintances of present employees are considered one of the best sources for new labor, they can create real problems. Let the applicant's qualifications be the deciding factor, not whom he knows.

### Breaking-in New Employees

Excellent hiring techniques are defeated by poor breaking-in methods. Personnel management research shows that most people vividly remember their first day on a job. As a manager in charge of breaking-in a new employee, remember that the newcomer may feel conspicuous and uncertain. Although he wants to make a good impression, he may hesitate to ask questions because he does not want to appear stupid. The newcomer probably knows no one in the organization and wants to be accepted. The new employee's immediate supervisor may wish to use the following procedures for breaking-in a new worker.

- Review in detail company policies and rules even though they were discussed during the hiring interview. Cover the following points verbally and give written information concerning them to the new worker: lay-off and separation procedures, conduct on the job, hours of work, absenteeism, sickness, pay day, vacations and holidays.

- Introduce the new worker to all employees with whom he will be in contact. Let each of the old employees know at the time of introduction exactly what the new worker is to do.

- Show the new employee the location of facilities such as wash rooms and lounges.

- Start the new employee on the job by thoroughly explaining his duties. Furnish a copy of the written job description to the employee. He should be encouraged to ask questions at this time.

- Let the new employee perform the duties. The nature of the work will govern how this is done. Encourage the new worker to ask why he does each task, procedure or process.

- Follow up with the new employee at his work site. The frequency of this action will depend on the type of work. Follow-up, however, is the step most frequently overlooked by supervisors. New workers too often are turned loose on the job and left on their own to become productive. Employees in this insecure predicament waste time and materials; they are generally discouraged and frustrated.

*Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic levels, race, color, sex, religion or national origin.*